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Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Secretary-General says the UN should take initiative to deal with multinational dimensions of terrorism.

* Cuba, in address to General Assembly, asks if sovereign right to defend borders and national security is only prerogative of powerful and not poor or small countries.

* Plan of action for Indo-Chinese refugees to end in June.

* UN Centre for Human Rights to hold expert seminar on indigenous land rights.

* Bangkok forum to focus on impending urban crisis in Asia.

* Seminar in Rio de Janeiro to examine role of public administration in development of infrastructure

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has called for the United Nations to take a new initiative to deal with the multinational dimensions of terrorism. In a statement issued in Mexico City yesterday, the Secretary-General said an upsurge in terrorism required the international community to stand together, speak out and unit against those despicable acts of violence. Referring to Monday's terrorist bombing in Tel Aviv, he said nothing could justify the acts of those who murdered and maimed innocent people. No grievance could excuse cowardly attempts to spread fear and death among a civilian population.

Terrorists feared negotiations and rejected democratic processes, which was why they stepped up their attacks whenever there was progress towards peace, he continued. The international community must not let terrorists succeed, nor give credence to their explanations. The Middle East peace process and progress towards peace and justice must go forward.

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For information media—not an official record

Meanwhile, the Secretary-General wound up his official visit to Mexico today, meeting first with United Nations staff and later with the Chairman of the Revolutionary Democratic Party and the former Mexican Ambassador to the United Nations, Borcillio Munez-Ledo.

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Cuba had exercised the right of all States to defend its territorial integrity, sovereignty and peace of its citizens, the Cuban Foreign Minister, Roberto Robaina Gonzalez said today. He was addressing a resumed session of the General Assembly on the downing of two American civilian planes by Cuban airforce jets on 24 February. He asked whether the sovereign right to defend borders and national security was only a prerogative of the powerful and not the poor and small countries. He asked whether the United States would have tolerated such provocations and accepted aircraft from Cuba or any other country illegally entering its airspace to drop subversive leaflets?

He said the incident on 24 February was not the result of a deliberate act by Cuba. In last twenty months, "Brothers to the Rescue", the organization which flew the planes, violated Cuban airspace 25 times. Twice in January, they had dropped hundreds of thousands of subversive flyers over Havana. Cuba had begged the U.S. to prevent the flights which violated the laws of both countries. In September 1994, United States civil aviation authorities admitted that the flights threatened genuine efforts taken by the U.S. Coast Guard to rescue illegal Cuban emigrants.

Referring to legislation passed by the United States Senate yesterday to tighten the U.S. economic embargo against Cuba, Mr. Gonzalez said the restrictions were an open challenge to the Assembly's condemnation of the blockade. The extraterritorial dimensions of the legislation went beyond national boundaries and violated the laws of many countries. It curtailed freedom of commerce, a sacrosanct principle of the contemporary economic system, and created international legal principles.

The Permanent Representative of the United States, Madeleine Albright, exercising a right of reply, said her Government did not seek a confrontation with Cuba and the United States and its people wished the tragedy had not occured. However, it could not be silent when its citizens were murdered and could not allow the Cuban Government, which had ordered the crime, to transfer blame to the victims. Cuba had knowingly and wilfully and in broad daylight, shot down two unarmed aircraft which were clearly marked as civilian. The aircraft were no threat to the Cuban people or Government, they were in international airspace and were destroyed intentionally and in violation of international law.

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A plan of action set up to help refugees from Viet Nam and Laos will formally end on 30 June. The plan was adopted seven years ago by the Steering Committee of the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees. The decision means the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) will phase out care and maintenance of facilities in South-East Asian camps for rejected asylum seekers as of 1 July. It will maintain alternative arrangements in Hong Kong. The Agency's extensive programme to monitor people who have returned to Viet Nam and Laos and its financial assistance and micro-development project to facilitate the return of refugees will continue.

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The United Nations Centre for Human Rights will hold an expert seminar on the practical aspects of indigenous land rights and claims. The seminar, which will be held in Canada from 24 to 28 March, will mark the International Decade of Indigenous People. It will focus on three major themes: the negotiating process and legal arrangements for demarcating and titling indigenous lands; opportunities for economic development and arrangements for sharing resources; and the role of the United Nations in supporting land rights and development through training or use of natural resources.

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The Second Asia-Pacific Urban Forum will focus on the looming crisis in Asian cities when it meets in Bangkok from 11 to 15 March. It will discuss a paper prepared by a group of experts from Asia and the Pacific under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The paper examines accountability and transparency by politicians and public servants in the face of the impending crisis and "gangsterism" and corruption in public housing.

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The United Nations and Brazil will hold a three-day inter-regional seminar on the role of public administration in developing infrastructure and protecting the environment. The seminar, which will begin tomorrow in Rio de Janeiro, will address how governments and public administrators can manage economic growth in a framework of sustainable development. It will focus on appropriate infrastructural facilities, protection of the environment and equitable social development.

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